Tape #15
Interview with Harry R. Reed
Date: 8/25/08
Interview by
Transcribed and Logged by Hanna Walicki
Checked by

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00:49
CD: If you would introduce yourself and tell us where you are from originally.

00:54
HR: Well, my name is Harry R. Reed, and I was originally born in Bremmenton, Washington. And I grew up in a small town near Bremmenton, and I joined the navy in Seattle in, uh, January of 1941and uh, then I finished boot camp in San Diego, and went to aviation machinist mate school, and after about 6 months of that they transferred me to a patrol squadron in Kaneyone Bay on Oahu Island at patrol wing one and I got there about the latter part of September, first of November 1941.

01:56
CD: Why did you join the navy? What was your reason?

02:00
HR: I, I really, actually, back about that time I knew they were starting to draft people for the army, and of course being born in Bremmenton and watching the battle ships and the different ships coming into the navy yard all the time, I had, uh, desire, I had a twin brother and we both watched the same ships since we were little kids, and we would talk about going, when we got big, that we were going to get in the navy so we both came in the navy with the idea of staying in for a career. My desire was to join the navy and stay in there all the time, to stay, and so I did. But, uh, I uh, I was in school and at Gig Harbor and I decide that I would **(03:00)** rather go in the navy than go to school so I went down on my 17th birthday, was on Sunday so I couldn't go in on Sunday, but I went to the recruiting office in Tacoma on Monday which was the first working day, and they gave me my preliminary physical and everything there and then they sent me to Seattle after that...for the final and taking my oath and they shipped me to San Diego then to boot camp. So I stayed in the navy for 30 years.

03:50
CD: When you were, um, in 1941what were you and what was your title and what was your rank?

03:58
HR: When the war started***? (Chuck says mm'hmm at 4:00)*** I was a seaman. And I was, uh, actually I was assigned to patrol squadron 12 and my assigned

duty there was to drive the captain's car and uh, do general work, whatever they wanted me to do around there, uh, in the squadron. And uh, so I'd go up to the captain's house in the morning at 6:30 and pick him up and we would drive down to the hanger down there and then I would take care of the vehicle after that and then go onto extra work, other types of work. We were on Hawaiian hours at the time, and so we would just...**(05:00)** I don't recall anything special...uh, I had security watches at night sometimes and general duty that all sailors have 6 days a week...and Sunday off. But we really only worked from 7 o'clock in the morning till uh, about lunch time or 1 o'clock and then the rest of the day was off anyway, except for the duty section and the people that were flying. But I wasn't in the flight crew then, so I didn't have to do any of that.

05:41
CD: Could you describe what life was like on Hawaii prior to December 7th?

05:47
HR: Well, *(clears throat)* I really don't know too much about the island because I didn't go ashore. I stayed on the base and uh, just got familiar with the **(6:00)**...my buddies and the people on the, in the squadron and did that kind of stuff. And uh, on Sunday, or on a Saturday afternoon or time off we would just go down to down to a coconut grove and knock cocoanuts out of the palm trees and, break em open and eat coconut, I remember doing that. And uh, I don't know for sure, my memory doesn't *(shifts in his seat)* serve me well enough to say, what, if I did go ashore at all before the war I guess I might have went over to Kauilu, which was a little town not too far from the base, but other than that I don't remember anything other than just being, being a young sailor on the base doing the duty they told me to do and...uh that's it.

06:57
CD: What was your day like on December 6th?

07:01
HR: On the 6th? *(Chuck repeats: On the 6th)* The 6th was routine, the 6th of December was a routine day, we just did our, whatever we were supposed to do on Saturday and then we had the rest of the day off. I don't remember anything special about December 6th at all. We had, the squadron had inspection in the morning. And they inspected the crew, and they inspected the airplanes, inspected the area for general cleanliness, and the routine inspection that the captain performed...on that day.

07:45
CD: Did you have any awareness of the tensions starting to arise between Japan and the United States?

07:51
HR: Not really, um, actually I had the midnight watch one time, and a gun tub, **(08:00)** down on the ramp by the corner of the hanger and the officer of the day came by and I was on watch from midnight till 4 in the morning. And the officer

of the day came by and told us that, there would probably, there might be some, some civilians on the ramp area down there and we were were not supposed to stop them or question them or anything because they were on a special mission, and so that was my only inkling that something might be, uh stirring that we were not told about...but they were apparently, the, the navy apparently had reason to be doing some investigating around..and they had, uh I supposed secret service people doing it. **(09:00)**

09:01
CD: Were you reading any of the papers or national magazines at the time that were talking about the diplomatic...the things that were going on between Japan and the United States.

09:12
HR: Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge, I didn't know anything about any of that stuff. Of course being a 17 year old kid you didn't read the paper, didn't read magazines, we just did what we were doing and our life was just from day to day. Uh...I'm sure they, I'm sure that there were other things going on that we were not privy to, we didn't, they didn't, we didn't have to know and they didn't tell us, they didn't keep us informed on anything like that. Security was normal...uh, just like the security on any military establishment at that time. **(10:00)** You just had your normal security and we were separated from all population, you know civilian population was not around us at all. So we only knew our own little world.

10:18
CD: Lets go to the day of the 7th. Would you walk me through your day and describe what you saw, what you heard and when you became aware of what was going on?

10:31
HR: Well, I was, I was awakened, uh, in, in the barracks about about 7 o'clock in the morning. And there were some airplanes flying around, uh, they would fly right past the windows on the barracks. And uh, so I got out of bed and I was looking at them airplanes, and then I decided I would put my clothes on because they had a red ball on the side of them and that **(11:00)** wasn't something I'd ever seen before, however, I wasn't too excited about it because I knew that the army air corps, would, had been on maneuvers around there for about two weeks and my first thought was that those were just army airplanes flying around, I didn't know, I didn't have any reason to think about anything else. But then they, they came in with an announcement on the uh, intercom system for all hands to report to their duty stations. Well being Sunday, uh...the uniform of the day was whites, white uniforms unless you were doing in the duty section, and had some work done, duties that required work and then you wore other clothes because...and so I put my white uniform on and I started down to the hanger **(12:00)**
and uh, they stopped me at the mess hall and told me to go back to the, through the galley, and back to the back porch there, loading dock back there, and they

had a washing machine back there and so I went back there and they told me take off my uniform and I took it off and they put it in the washing machine, and the washing machine was full of the morning coffee that was left over. So they put all of our uniforms in there, in the washing machine, and they just washed them around a little bit, and run them through the runner, ringer, and gave them back to us, and we put them on and proceeded to our duty station. And that was the first camouflage that we ever had had anything to do with, and so, you know, that uniform dried out almost immediately in the Hawaiian weather, but I arrived at the hanger, and it was after the first attack was over by the time I got there **(13:00).** The damage to the aircrafts and stuff had already been accomplished to a degree. Um, they were loading a pick up truck with uh, armor plate to make a gun emplacement outside and uh, so when I got there the chief knew that I was a driver so he told me, he said 'Reed, you take that, take this truck and take that armor plate out to a spot out there'. And they told me where it was, and they're gonna build up a gun turret, a gun emplacement. So, I drove out of the hanger and I drove over there where that spot was and uh, I just was backing up to the spot where I was going to unload and there was another fella there **(14:00)** at the time, another sailor, and I noticed a flight of airplanes was going over our head and, course by then I knew they were Japs, but uh, two of them peeled off from the formation and they come around, and they was coming down aiming right toward where I was. So, somebody hollered for me to get out of that truck, so I jumped out of the truck and ran around the corner of the building and away from...the airplanes were firing their machine guns and they were hitting on a concrete ramp where I was running and they blew the truck all to pieces, the truck was demolished immediately. And all I got out of that was a bunch of concrete **(15:00)** and gravel and shrapnel spray and stuff in my arm and my right side, it didn't bother enough to where I had to go to the sick bay or, or have any emergency treatment of any kind. So I went back into the hanger and the other fella who was with me got his leg damaged pretty bad so I got two men to come out and help carry him into the hanger and then uh, I reported to the chief and told him I was... 'what do you want me to do now'? So we generally did work around, tried to clean up stuff and spruce up the, the hanger had been damaged to an extent, the water system had to, come out, the water, there was fire, the fire water, and stuff had ..come out to put... so **(16:00)** there was lots of water all over the hanger. And so actually we busied ourselves cleaning up that stuff until later on in the day they got the armories opened up and they gave us each rifles, to my knowledge they were thirty-aught six rifles. They gave each one of us a rifle, and so uh, then the remained of the day we were just were around there on alert in case, we didn't know if the Japs were gonna come ashore you know? We kind of assumed that they would make a landing, which they didn't of course. That night then, when nightfall came or in the afternoon, they put us up on the side of a small mountain they had there. And we stayed overnight up on that hill, just in case we had a problem. And I think we stayed **(17:00)** on that alert for a day or two and uh, we could see all the black smoke coming from the other side of the island over there and so we knew they were doing a lot of damage over there too but, our own experience there was that we lost all of our airplanes. All the airplanes we had on the ramp plus the ones that were anchored out on the bay on ready alert were all destroyed. I don't think they were able to repair,

maybe they repaired one airplane later, I don't think they did. I believe we got all new airplanes, and uh, all I remember doing was just working, doing general duty work, and uh, after about two or three days or a week **(18:00)** I was given a detail to go and help pack the personal...um belongings of the dependents because they were evacuating all of the families back to the states. So I worked with that detail for a couple of weeks, and then they put me on the camouflage crew and we went around and painted all the windows on the living quarters black so they wouldn't have illumination at night. And in general we just blacked out everything on the base. I did that, I guess I worked in that detail for a month or a little longer maybe, and uh, then I went up, since I was the captain's driver, and **(19:00)** we had no, no vehicle to drive anymore because it was destroyed, I was detailed up to the office up there and was the messenger for the personnel department, and that was, I did that until later I got to go to gunnery school and uh, then became an aerial gunner.

19:31
CD: Let's back up a little bit ... (adjusting camera) **(20:00)** *starts again* What was said when they called you to the battle-stations and what was the notification you got that you were being attacked.
HR: Well all it said on the intercom was that 'all hands report to their duty station..report to your duty station' that was the orders and so thats what we did. We got ready and , left and went to our duty stations. My duty station was down in the hanger at my squadron and everybody else who was in that same barracks was in the same squadron, we all went down to the hanger and reported for duty.

20:49
CD: When you first saw your, could you describe the scene of the wreckage and the uh...

20:55
HR: Well, all the airplanes that were there were on fire and uh, they were all burning because they were full of gasoline and they had been, actually they were mainly hit by, um, machine gun fire from the airplanes. There was probably a few bombs but not too many, they didn't drop very many bombs there, and they were only interested in the aircraft, they weren't interested in destroying the base. So, any place where it wasn't right, where the airplanes weren't wasn't damaged at all. There was no damage anyplace except right at, right at the, where we were at the hanger, where all the airplanes were. That's all they wanted.

21:47
CD: Did you know John Finn at all?

20:50
HR: I know of him, he was in a different squadron than mine, he was yes. John was quite a bit senior to me, he was a chief and I was a seaman. I knew who he was.

22:02

CD: Did you hear about what he did that day.

22:06
HR: I've heard tales about it, yeah. *(Chuck in background "very good").* Yeah.

22:09
CD: How did you become aware of what had happened at Pearl Harbor.
22:14
HR: Well...I supposed just, just through the grapevine they told us, everybody who, everybody found out that the, uh, they pretty well ruined the whole island. As far as the military they'd, there was Bellows Field was was over by us on that side of the island, and that was the army air car base and they damaged that too. And then they went over across the Pali and damaged everything that they...they pretty well knew where all the facilities were, and uh, the uh, the army, air corps bases **(23:00)** were all, they were all hit pretty hard too. And of course the word has been out since that they were surprised to find the battle ships all in the harbor, they didn't, actually they started out looking for aircraft carriers. But the carriers weren't there, none of them were there, there were out, they were at sea. So we, I don't know, probably over the period of a few days we pretty well knew that the damage was extensive. I knew uh, one of the junior officers in the squadron quite well, and they had told him, they had detailed him and one other to go to Pearl for temporary duty to help out over there at Pearl, so he **(24:00)** was away for a couple of weeks and came back and, and uh we got more of a detail then as to what the situation looked like over there, but, realistically they didn't bring us up to quarters and tell us what all went on, and we didn't get anything officially. Um, there was probably, I don't know, it's a day or two after the damage was completed, an airplane from San Diego arrived that belonged to a squadron that was in San Diego, and they brought out a bunch of, uh, people of, **(25:00)** higher echelon people from the state department and from Washington DC and there was a reserve commander that was amongst them and I saw him a couple of times at the hanger and up in the office where I was working. He showed up up there a few times, but he was a movie producer is what he was. He wasn't just, I think he was their mainly to evaluate the extent of damage, he'd been you know, put on active duty so he was there to evaluate the situation both at the base where I was plus the Navy base at Pearl and stuff like that.

25:56
CD: When the attack was going on, what were you feeling, what were your emotions at the time?

26:02
HR: That's pretty hard to say, it all happened, as a matter of, quite, quite quickly. It's pretty hard to say what we thought of other than 'well, how long am I going to be here before I get hit?' Or something like that you know, you don't think about those things you just do what you're told to do. And if, and like myself getting sprayed with that shrapnel and concrete and stuff was just a routine. That's what happened to me. And if I would have been out there in amongst the

airplanes, it would have been a different situation then. Probably would've gotten banged up a little bit more, some did. I know Johnny Finn took a machine gun, uh put it in commission right there in one of the airplanes and **(27:00)** we had a couple other guys take machine guns out of the airplanes and put them in the hanger and they held them by different people hanging onto them while somebody else fired them and they shot at the Jap planes out through window at the hanger and stuff like that. So we did what we could, everybody did what they could to take care of the situation that was at hand. Really, we didn't wait for any orders, we just went ahead and did things.

27:36
CD: So how long before you were back up in full operation?

27:40
HR: I would imagine it was over a week. Because we didn't get any airplanes for probably a week, took about a week to get any airplanes, and to get all the scrap scraped away and piled up out of the way so we could operate.

28:07
CD: What was, how did life on the island change after the attacks on December 7th?
28:16
HR: Well I can only talk about myself, we were restricted, we were all restricted to the base, we couldn't go off the base, we couldn't go on liberty or nothing like that for I don't know it must have been...maybe a month maybe more than that. Our whole life was just right on the naval establishment, I don't know what went on outside. We had civilians working on the base and they went home and they came back and commuted back and forth every day and like that, and I knew some of them. But, their life was just like ours, just, it went on **(29:00)** as best it could I'm sure.

29:04
CD: What's the one thing about that day that stands out in your memory?

29:10
HR: Probably jumping out of that truck when they were shooting at it *(laughs)*. But the whole thing was, you know, getting up in the morning and seeing the airplanes fly by the window and deciding that they were not for fun. They were actually shooting, there was a lot of bullet fragments, bullet holes in the barracks out there too. Luckily the barracks were concert, they weren't wooden, wooden structures that would burn. So we didn't, didn't have any big damages to our living quarters at all.

END OF TAPE